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ABSTRACT

Student-athletes face a number of challenges that are not inherently addressed in a collegiate institutional structure. In addition to the usual sets of academic and social pressures faced by their nonathlete peers, student-athletes face a unique set of demands, including athletic training, competition, media relations, strength and conditioning programs, and attention to a life style that has little opportunity for continuation beyond the college experience. A review of the literature highlights issues in three areas: programming for student athletes, the role of the athletic director, and the role of the senior student affairs officer. Although athletics directors and the senior student affairs officers play important roles in the development, retention, and growth of student-athletes, not to be overlooked is the importance of the involvement of middle-level administrators in working with student-athletes. True support for student-athletes may come from alternative sources, including supportive faculty members and residence hall directors. Recommended is an increased reliance on orientation or transitional programs to address the unique needs of student-athletes. (Contains 34 references.) (MAB)

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A Review of Literature Related to Service for College Student-Athletes

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Abstract

College student athletes play an important role in the culture of an institution. In return for their contributions on the playing field, however, student-athletes face a number of challenges that are not inherently addressed in a collegiate institutional structure. Although the athletics director and the senior student affairs officer play important roles in the development, retention, and growth of student-athletes, the review of literature identifies the importance of the involvement of middle-level administrators in working with student-athletes. Recommended is an increased reliance on orientation or transitional programs to address the unique needs of student-athletes.

College athletics are a labor-intensive, human resource capital driven industry. The industry relies upon the willing cooperation of undergraduate students and administrators in creating an environment of fair play and wholesome competition. With the introduction of financial gain, however, college athletics have evolved into a machine which operates virtually independent of the institution. Lost in this world of big-time college sports are the student-athletes.

In college athletics, the chief concern of the student affairs professional is the relationship which exists between the institution, as represented by a division of student affairs, and the student-athlete. The student-athlete faces the same sets of academic and social pressures as non-athletes, in addition to the unique demands of participation in intercollegiate athletics. These demands often include athletic training, competition, media relations, strength and conditioning programs, and attention to a life-style that has little opportunity for continuation beyond the college experience (Seelig, 1983). The development of a student affairs perspective might be preceded by axioms reflecting the academic mission of the institution and the mission of student affairs, the out-of-class environment and personal circumstances of students, and recognition that athletes are indeed students. Athletes, as students, face many difficulties, including the

demands of intercollegiate athletics, the stress of athletics, and the risk of being developmentally "short-changed" (Bloland, 1987). Thus, athletic and student affairs departments around the nation have attempted to address this problem by fusing the relationship between athletics and academics.

Some institutions and researchers have previously noticed a need for college athletic paradigm shifts. These researchers have concentrated on various areas of student-athlete development. Etzel, Ferrante, and Pinkney (1991) reported that student-athletes are presented with complex personal challenges in three areas: personal, academic, and athletic. Other research, however, has shown emphasis in the area of academic development which includes academic monitoring, general academic advising, tutoring, and structured study time (Gurney, Robinson, & Fygetakis, 1983). Gabbard and Halischank (1993) wrote that special counseling was required to meet the complex personal challenges of student-athletes.

Academic support services are provided to student-athletes to acknowledge that they have special needs which are concentrated in two general areas: athletics and academics (Gibson & Creamer, 1987). Because student-athletes were usually not as well prepared and had demanding schedules, academic development was viewed as a very critical area for program developers (Blann, 1995). Parham

(1993) insisted that one of the keys to overcoming these challenges was to assist student-athletes in learning to balance their academic and athletic endeavors. Many athletic departments, such as the University of Michigan, have found that by developing intense, costly instructional services during the athletes first two years, they could save money which was usually used to place athletes in additional course work to maintain their eligibility and to assist them in working toward graduation after their eligibility was depleted (Walter & Smith, 1986). Gabbard and Halischak (1993) wrote that the goals of these programs were to decrease academic difficulties, to enhance academic skills rather than overcoming immediate crises, and to provide more individual assistance in organizational and study skills.

These types of special academic services are necessary to assist student-athletes. There has been a great deal of additional research from the academic perspective, but the problem is still more complex for program developers. Developers must take into account that out-of-class activity is important in the development of student-athletes, and that often, the out-of-class activity can be all encompassing (Sowa & Gressard, 1983).

In light of the issues surrounding the development of student-athletes at all types of collegiate institutions, this discussion is framed around primary responsibility

toward student-athletes. Programming, athletic director, and senior student affairs professionals perspectives are all considered. Literature for the analysis were collected using the ERIC clearinghouses and the library systems available at The University of Alabama.

Programming for Student-Athletes

Sanz and Whitner (1987) presented a paper on the University of Toledo's Athletic Planning Program (APP) which was designed to assist incoming freshmen with adjustment to the academic rigors and expectations of college. An initial assessment of the 136 freshman athletes was conducted in the 1983-1984 academic year, and students were classified by risk level (high, moderate, and low). High and moderate risk students were required to meet with Counseling Center personnel weekly to learn study skills, academic survival techniques, and provided important personal counseling on topics ranging from social relationship management to personal development issues.

Harney (1986) developed a similar program based on a prototype set of procedures called Freshman Athletes Scholastic Testing (FAST). Freshman athletes from a variety of athletic programs sere evaluated and placed into groups according to their risk level. The FAST program consistently improved the grade point average of each

representative sample of risk groups and increased student-athlete persistence.

Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, and Waters (1981), reported that the personal development of student-athletes needs to be enhanced to ensure student success. In the program at the University of Florida, which they described, every component of the program was customized to meet the special needs of student-athletes. These components included residential counselors and advisors, a personal development course, and a senior exit seminar.

The University of North Texas initiated an academic support program through which there was reported a 50% increase in the retention of freshmen athletes. All freshmen, first-year transfer students, and those athletes with unacceptable grade point averages were required to attend daily study hall. The program also provided study skills training, individual advising, and personal encouragement (Scholastic Assistance, 1986).

Chickering's (1969) concept of the achievement of developmental tasks has been important to researchers who are interested in the psychological well-being and adjustment of the college student. Sowa and Gressard (1983), using Chickering's concepts, reported that athletes experienced problems in achieving some developmental tasks, including formulating well defined educational and career goals and gaining satisfaction from educational experiences.

The college experience of student-athletes has been described as being closed to exploratory opportunities due to the high identification of athletics with the privileges which accompany their participation in sports (Hansen & Sackett, 1993). Research based conclusions in both of the latter studies emphasized more involvement by academic advisors and career counselors in assisting student-athletes to explore their personal interests, identifying vocational alternatives, and the selection of majors early in their academic careers.

Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1993) described the act of foreclosure when an individual committs an act prematurely without full exploration of needs, values, or alternatives. They wrote that since sports have become such an integral part of society, it seemed necessary for counseling psychologists to "become more conversant with this activity as an environment for intervention" (p. 356). The athletic systems model was viewed as a subculture which presented unique scenarios peripheral to traditional counseling behaviors and interactions. Parham (1993) wrote that due to the unique mental and physical stresses of student-athletes, they need to develop skills while in college in areas such as health and injury issues, preparation for career development, and opportunities for special assistance as needed by women, minorities, and student-athletes with disabilities.

These programs were developed by a variety of administrators in pursuit of a more conducive environment for student learning. This belief, that the institution has a responsibility to student academic performance has also been embraced by the division of athletics, namely through the assigning of responsibility to the athletic director (AD). The AD, through formal administrative responsibility, has ultimate authority for student-athletes, and suubsequently, is addressed in the literature.

Role of the Athletic Director

Although the college president has ultimate authority for an institution's athletic program, it has traditionally been the athletic director (AD) who handles the overall daily operations of the intercollegiate athletic program (Bailey & Littleton, 1991). The AD has the responsibility of keeping the program in good standing through compliance with institutional, conference, and NCAA or NAIA rules and regulations (Sperber, 1990). The AD also has responsibility for all aspects of the division's operation from public relations to the formation and implementation of sound fiscal policies and business procedures (University of Alabama Office of Personnel, 1986). The person in this position must also be able to supervise various constituents, including program staff, support groups,

alumni groups, and student-athletes (Thelin & Wiseman, 1989).

Historically, ADs have been drawn from the ranks of prominent coaches who held dual appointments. This has gradually changed, as search committees have begun to select professionals with experience in business management, public relations, financial management, and external relations. The positions have become complex, all-encompassing which require personnel supervision, financial management, marketing, compliance, academic advising; all areas identified as requiring both a unique set of personal qualities and professional competencies (Thelin & Wiseman, 1989). Frost (1971) wrote that the complex role of the AD included responsibility for

> public relations; for administration of meets and contests; for planning and scheduling the use of facilities; for the procurement, issuance, and care of equipment; for the formulation and implementation of sound fiscal policies and business procedures; for the protection of athletes and coaches; for the adherence to rules and regulations; and for the attainment of the aims, goals, and objectives of the institution. (p. 242)

Bailey and Littleton (1991) emphasized that the successful athletic director should have expertise in

sports, possess marketing and fund raising skills, and have strong managerial skills of human, financial, and physical resources. They also found that the AD should be an educator who should ensure the integrity of the program and the institution. This included service on academic councils and other educational endeavors which promote the integration of athletics and education. Chu (1989) argued that ADs were not held to this duty of emphasizing the importance of a unified philosophy of athletics and education. He concluded that this was because most faculty have neglected intercollegiate athletics unless it is forced upon them, and because ADs have become too engaged in the business of sports, winning, and bringing in money. Sperber (1990), among others, has been critical of this business-like entertainment nature of intercollegiate athletics. He argued, for example, that this philosophy has been a compelling reason for the corruption of many athletic programs. Due to the controversial autonomy of the AD, there has been a growing emphasis on the senior student affairs officer as having a role in the governance of athletic programs (Michener, 1976; Blake, 1979; Golden, 1984). This role is based largely on the humanistic, developmental aspect of student affairs professionals in helping undergraduates more holistically realize their potential.

Role of the Senior Student Affairs Officer

Presidents and faculty often find themselves oblivious to their athletic programs and the students involved in them (Gunn & Eddy, 1989). Sperber (1991) wrote that presidents need to be in charge of athletic programs, which means being knowledgeable of all of its operations. Even though the president may have ultimate authority over the program, Golden (1984) recommended that the senior student affairs officer (SASO) of the institution be delegated to specifically oversee program operations. He wrote that the attention of the SASO is a necessity because athletics were "developmental in nature, and need the attention of the chief student affairs officer" (p. 61). Blake (1979) reported that it was important for the SASO to have a philosophy of athletics which was congruent with the mission, goals, and objectives of the institution. The job description of the SASO is complex with the most important roles being that of manager, mediator, and educator (Sandeen, 1991). Barr (1993) wrote that there are many skills and competencies necessary to be successful as a SASO, including a caring belief system for students.

SASOs must be competent in the design and implementation of programs. As reported by Andreas (1993), the essentials of program planning include three factors: context, goals, and planning. All planning should be based on the mission of the institution along with the involvement

of all constituencies in the process. Andreas (1993) concluded that programs will succeed if these two criteria are properly addressed.

The SASO must be able to evaluate programs in order to revise, retain, expand, or eliminate the program (Brown & Podolske, 1993). They described this strategy as being a political process composed of five steps

> (1) identify who the decision makers and stakeholers are; (2) establish a purpose of the evaluation; (3) decide what information is needed; (4) determine when, how, and from whom to collect information; and (5) decide when and how the evaluation will be reported. (p. 217)

In using these steps, SASOs should keep in mind that the process goes beyond mere objective procedures, and includes many subjective issues which are typically political and require value judgements. This supports Lunsford's (1984) report that management has become more prominent in the role of the SASO while the traditional functions of student development and student relations has been maintained. Randall and Globetti (1991) also reported that managerial skills are perceived to be important by institutional presidents when they begin searches to fill the SASO position, but personal and inter-personal skills seemed to be the most valued attributes.

Discussion

College athletics do not inherently conflict with the academic mission of colleges and universities, yet the trend to capitalize on athletic programs in support of revenue can cause tension. This tension can create conflict between the academic and athletic expectations of students, with the exciting and glamorous perspective of big-time college sports often winning. Lost in the discussion is the growth, development, and learning of the college student-athlete, and the responsibility for these students. The literature base suggests that a combination of either the athletic director or senior student affairs officer has primary responsibility for student-athletes.

Despite the arguments that a senior level administrator has responsibility for student-athletes, true support may come from alternative sources. Supportive faculty, for example, may play a key role in assisting student-athletes in selecting a major or planning a career path. Residence hall directors, as the primary source of daily contact throughout the year, may also prove to be key growth agents for students. The concept to be stressed, however, is that no single administrator can take on responsibility for all student-athletes, and the alternative is a holistic, environmental approach to creating a climate and desire for student learning, retention, and growth. This holistic approach, as suggested by such scholars as James Banning,

requires athletic divisions to work more closely with student affairs and academic affairs offices to examine and enhance an existing structure, building areas of strength in working with students.

Another area which athletic departments can work with to enhance student-athlete growth, development, and learning is with orientation or transitional programs. Several institutions have created special orientation programs for student-athletes, and these key models may be helpful for others to develop similar programs. New student orientation programs develop a sense of cohesiveness among students, convey institutional expectations for academic performance and personal conduct, and convey important information about the procedural operation of the institution. Another concept may be to attempt an extended orientation program, such as the university studies/life 101 course, designed specifically for student-athletes.

The research identified seems to indicate a subculture of research concerning collegiate athletics. This subculture is comprised of the traditional elements of social science research, but has not developed into a comprehensive body of literature. Research topics such as the collaboration of athletics and student affairs, revenue sharing, administrator training, and the future of student-athletes are all ripe for additional research in the near future. Only through this type of research can this field

of study fully emerge as an accepted research track among practitioners and scholars.

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